called in sick to work today. I told them that I was sicker than I had ever been in my entire life. It may have been a burning lie, or it may have been of the darkest shades of truth. I truly feel sick—to my stomach, to my mind, to the world around me. I have stared into space all day, nearly catatonic. My mind muses over every facet of the situation.

I now know the name of the martyr: Cassie, and I have learned it in one of the worst possible ways. She is no longer just that poor red-headed little girl. She is Cassie, a human being with both a face and now a name. The words and actions her father used echo behind my eyes. I keep seeing it. I see it when I shut them closed. I see it when I flutter them open.

I hear a car pass by and my ears perk up, as they do every time. Instead of passing by as usual, I hear the car stop. I'm filled with exhilaration as I get up and walk to the window. I still am very weary of the last thing I saw out there. But for once I feel a bright shining star above me as I see a red car parked next to the curb in front of my neighbor's house.

Time has frozen. It must have. For a grueling period nothing happens. No one exits the car. No one goes to question why the car is there. No birds chirp. I don't breathe. The hands of the clock behind me do not click. The stillness of it all is enough to drive a man to tears. I feel like someone has grasped pliers around one of my teeth and is trying to jar it loose frantically. Every second that manages to pass by causes another surge of pain to run through me. It's torture to say the least.

Finally, a man emerges from the car. He marches forward towards the house so incredibly slowly. I feel like pounding on the glass, urging him to move faster. Instead I grit my teeth. I watch. I wait. He walks. The pliers twist and twist. They jostle back and forth in desperation. The holder is panicked; in a hurry. The tooth comes out.

The man knocks on the door. It's a most wonderful sound, marred only by the agony of waiting. He knocks on the door again. He steps back and examines the driveway, and then knocks once more. The pliers come in for another round. I'm tearing up at the pain before the door swings open.

The devil steps onto the porch and shakes the man's hand. He has a suave smile. The bastard doesn't know that the dye has been cast. He doesn't know that the tyranny and terror is about to end. He doesn't know that it's almost over. I want to smirk, but as any battle-hardened soldier knows you don't smile until the final enemy drops down dead. It's almost over, but we're not quite there yet.

The two of them disappear inside the house. The pliers aren't done yet. I try to occupy myself during this brutal time. I pace across the living room. I stare at the clock. It's going too slow. I'm ready to punch the damn thing. Every few second ticks I rush back to the window with reckless abandon. I eventually trip over the coffee table and fall to the floor. I'm letting this get to me, way too much.

It'll all be over soon, I don't need to worry. It's a mantra I tell myself as I sit down. The rain pounds on the window and I keep rambling on to myself. It's like a spell that will cause all the strife and stress to just go away. It'll be all over soon. The man will see what cannot be unseen. He'll fix everything. The world will be restored to normal. I don't need to worry.

I hear something: a door, a car. I walk to the window. Is it over now? The devil still has that smirk on his face. He pats the man on the back and escorts him down the long trail to his car. A mirror cracks. Yes it is over now. The fight is lost; the fortress no longer stands. Hopes have crumbled like bricks falling to dust. Flames of desolation simmer across the battlefield. This warrior is no longer able to fight. He needs to sit down and gaze upon the disaster and destruction that plagues the land. He needs to look to the sky and see the sun shining down. He needs to scream at the top of his lungs in rage, in hatred. He needs to unleash the monster within. I see the car door slam and a smile fade. A burning eye casts my way. An arrow is shot down from on high, piercing me in my raw-torn heart. I stumble backwards, feeling like a fallen casualty.

Utter defeat ties me to the ground. There's a gaping wound in my chest. There must be. I don't feel anything, but the cold of my dead, numb body. Did my imagination betray me? Did it paint a reality that I did not see? Did the facts lie to me? Each actor of the play did their damnedest to convince me of horrors bleak and bold. Was the man a lunatic, blind to the obvious?

I hear screams from behind the veil. They're not real either, are they? A whip

lashing out doesn't cause any harm, does it? The sword causes no bloodshed, does it? Wicked tyrants deserve to stand and statues made of grandeur deserve to crumble. These are the lies I must believe to accept this truth. I know what I saw. I will always know what I saw. As I close my eyes the play unfolds once again.

Bright moonshine pulls me from whatever pit I had been plunged into. I lie awake, paralyzed. What's the point in moving? I'm dead now. I can't shake my eyes away from the full silvery moon, and I can't hear anything but knocking. Wait, knocking? The corpse comes back to life and struggles to the window. In the pale moonlight, I see Cassie pounding on the door of my neighbor's house. What the fuck is going on now? I thrust my door open and make my way next door.

"What's going on over here?" I demand.

"Daddy won't let me in!" the little girl says, banging on the door.

Reality finds me once more. I wish I could be happy that I'm not delusional, but I'm not willing to have emotions right now. I ask Cassie to move out of the way and I barrage the door. I'm intent on breaking the damn thing if it doesn't open. The door does open and I stand face-to-face with the devil himself.

"Hello, Mister—" I begin.

"Galvin," he responds.

"Mr. Galvin, why is your daughter out here banging on your door?"

He steps out of his house and looks down at me. His eyes still seem glazed from emotion, even this close. My face is in a perpetual sneer and he seems to take notice. He widens his gaze at me and puts his filthy fist across my mouth.

"Cassie get inside. I've got to take out the garbage," he says.

Cassie sniffles and crawls in the house. I struggle to break away, but the man's grip is way too tight. He begins to drag me. I throw my hands about, hitting whatever I can. A fist flies into my gut and the wind leaves. He carries me to the back of the house before dropping me. I don't move. I can't move. The only thing on my mind is the pain. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a set of keys. He sorts through them before grasping a small bronze one. He uses it to open his shed and pulls me into the darkness within.

"So, you think you know how to raise my child better than I do?" he asked. I hear metal scraping across a concrete floor. "I don't know who you are, but you will stay out of my business if you know what's good for you."

Something hard and blunt strikes my shoulder. I gasp out in pain. I grab it to try and soothe it. I would be rolling in agony if he didn't have his hard boot on my chest. Another strike. This time it's my knee. I hear a pop. I won't be walking out of here. Then I hear a deafening clang. It's right by my ear. He missed.

"You just might want to forget this whole little ordeal. You're sore, you've had a long day. Go home, get some rest. You're not going to get a second warning, do you understand?" I grunt. He stomps on my stomach and throws the door open. He walks out, letting something slide out of his hand. I see the head of a sledgehammer fall to the ground in the dim visibility of the street lights. The stick clatters before coming to rest after it. I suppose in some realm of thought it's nice to know what he tried to murder me with. I'm not standing anytime soon. I can at least sit though. Fury and fear have been neighbors in my mind for quite some time, but now they are indistinguishable.

I grab the sledgehammer, and pull it close to me. I grit my teeth as I climb it to get back to my feet. My knee shouts in pain. If it's not broken, it's somewhere close. My shoulder isn't too far off either. The sledgehammer isn't the perfect crutch, but it's enough to get me out of the shed and out of enemy territory.

I look to the streets. It's all electric buzz and deadened dark windows. Yeah I get it now. We deal with our own problems and our own sociopaths. Every step I take

closer to my house forces my knee to break into more shards. I'm crawling by the time I get to the door. I look back to the neighborhood street. My plight is invisible as well. The world is dead to me.